

MARCH 9, 1976

BREZHNEV AND THE MBFR TALKS

ANNCR: IN HIS SPEECH AT THE TWENTY-FIFTH SOVIET PARTY CONGRESS, GENERAL SECRETARY LEONID BREZHNEV DREW SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE SOVIET COUNTERPROPOSAL AT THE VIENNA TALKS FOR MUTUAL BALANCED FORCE REDUCTIONS (MBFR) IN CENTRAL EUROPE. VOA NEWS ANALYST JOHN ALBERT HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS ON WHERE THESE NEGOTIATIONS NOW STAND.

VOICE: THE SOVIET RESPONSE TO WESTERN PROPOSALS ON MUTUAL FORCE REDUCTIONS MADE IN DECEMBER WAS FORTHCOMING WITH UNUSUAL SPEED. IT MAY WELL HAVE BEEN A TACTICAL MOVE BY SOVIET LEADERS TO HAVE THE MOSCOW STAND ON RECORD BEFORE THE SOVIET PARTY CONGRESS. IN ANY CASE, MISTER BREZHNEV HAS GIVEN EVERY INDICATION THAT THE SOVIET UNION REMAINS INTERESTED IN PROGRESS AT THE VIENNA TALKS. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE TO SEE SOME NARROWING OF DIFFERENCES, ALTHOUGH NOT YET ON FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES.

SECRETARY BREZHNEV CONFIRMED IN HIS PARTY CONGRESS SPEECH THAT MOSCOW IS FOR THE FIRST TIME WILLING TO HAVE THE FIRST PHASE OF THE FORCE REDUCTIONS RESTRICTED TO THE TWO MAJOR POWERS, THE SOVIET UNION AND THE UNITED STATES. THIS IS A POSITION WHICH THE WEST HAS TAKEN ALL ALONG. MOSCOW CONTINUES TO INSIST, HOWEVER, THAT ALL OTHER PARTICIPANTS OF THE VIENNA CONFERENCE PROMISE TO FREEZE THEIR TROOP STRENGTH AT CURRENT LEVELS UNTIL PHASE TWO OF THE REDUCTIONS IS BROUGHT INTO FORCE. FOLLOWING THE WESTERN EXAMPLE, MOSCOW IS ALSO WILLING TO WITHDRAW A NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT, CAPABLE OF CARRYING NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND CERTAIN TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS.

THE SOVIET PROPOSALS IMPLY AN INTENT ON MOSCOW'S PART TO MEET SOME OF THE WESTERN DEMANDS. ACCORDING TO WESTERN NEWS REPORTS, MOSCOW IS NOW WILLING TO WITHDRAW ABOUT 30,000 TROOPS FROM EAST GERMANY IF THE UNITED STATES WITHDRAWS ABOUT 22,000 MEN FROM WEST GERMANY. THE SOVIET UNION ALSO OFFERS TO WITHDRAW TWO TO THREE TANK REGIMENTS WITH A TOTAL OF 200 TO 300 TANKS.

WHEN THIS IS COMPARED WITH THE WESTERN PROPOSALS, IT BECOMES IMMEDIATELY APPARENT HOW WIDE A GAP REMAINS. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE UNITED STATES HAS OFFERED TO WITHDRAW 29,000 SOLDIERS 1,000 NUCLEAR WARHEADS, 54 F-4 PHANTOM JETS AND 36 PERSHING ROCKET LAUNCHERS, PROVIDED THE SOVIET UNION PULLS OUT 68,000 SOLDIERS AND 1,700 TANKS.

MOSCOW CONTINUES TO INSIST ON EQUIVALENCE IN THE NUMBER OF FORCE WITHDRAWALS, WHILE OFFERING ONLY A TOKEN WITHDRAWAL OF TANKS. THE SOVIET UNION ALSO CONTINUES TO REJECT THE WESTERN DEMAND THAT BOTH SIDES AGREE ON AN EVENTUAL BALANCE IN REMAINING FORCES IN CENTRAL EUROPE. IN SHORT, MOSCOW WANTS EQUAL CUTS WHILE THE WEST DEMANDS A MUCH HIGHER PERCENTAGE IN CUTS APPLIED TO THE EASTERN SIDE.

THE WESTERN DEMANDS TOUCH AT THE VERY BASIS OF SECURITY ISSUES IN CENTRAL EUROPE. THERE EXISTS IN CENTRAL EUROPE WHAT THE WEST CALLS AN "ASYMMETRY" OF TROOPS AND HEAVY WEAPONS. IN PLAIN LANGUAGE, THE EAST HAS 150,000 TROOPS MORE THAN THE WEST AND HOLDS A SUPERIORITY IN TANK FORCES OF 9,500. IT IS THIS IMBALANCE IN MILITARY STRENGTH WHICH ENDANGERS SECURITY IN THE AREA. AND IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT THE WEST INSISTS ON AN EVENTUAL ROUGH BALANCE OF FORCES AND HEAVY WEAPONS.

THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED ONLY BY MAKING HEAVIER CUTS IN THE EASTERN FORCES. FOR EQUAL PERCENTAGE CUTS WOULD INCREASE RATHER THAN DECREASE THE IMBALANCE IN FORCES. THUS THE SOVIET PROPOSALS HAVE NOT YET APPROACHED THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM IN THE VIENNA NEGOTIATIONS.

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